

INTIMAN : THEATRE : FESTIVAL

July 30, 2013

Intiman's Original New Musical *Stu for Silverton* Radiates Hope and Humanity – Now On Stage

"It's a fond tribute to small-town Americana at its best, and to the kind of tolerance ordinary citizens can rise to" –*The Seattle Times*

Seattle, WA (July 29, 2013) – After making national headlines in 2008 the honorable, transgender Mayor of Silverton, Oregon Stu Rasmussen and his real-life story of hope and humanity have been rediscovered and adapted into an all-new musical receiving support from critics and community alike in the Pacific Northwest. *The Seattle Times* finds *Stu for Silverton* to be a **"genially groundbreaking, appealing new show"** that is **"accessible to viewers of all gender persuasions."** With music and lyrics by acclaimed Brooklyn-based pop-sensation Breedlove, and a book by Lortel Award winner Peter Duchan, *Stu for Silverton* is running as part of a developmental production at Intiman Theatre now running in repertory with three other productions through September 15, 2013.

Just three short years ago, Andrew Russell, current producing artistic director of the 2006 Regional Tony Award-winning Intiman Theatre (featured in *The New York Times* on July 14, 2013), conceived of *Stu for Silverton* and now also directs it's first fully realized, developmental production at Intiman Theatre in a staging that *The Seattle Times* calls **"vivaciously clever."** This story, that is "inherently theatrical" says Russell, follows the true life of Stu Rasmussen as he discovers himself to be a transgender person, how he reveals this to his reluctant small-town community and still is elected as their Mayor, and ultimately how Silverton and Rasmussen made national headline news.

In 2008, the "evangelical, attention-lusting bigots in Fred Phelps's Westboro Baptist Church" (*The Stranger*) travelled from Kansas to protest the election of Rasmussen as America's first openly trans mayor. The townsfolk of Silverton, once reluctant, fought back with picket signs reading "Our Love is Bigger Than Your Hate" and "We Love Stu" (also seen in *Stu for Silverton*) and over 200 Silvertonians dressed in drag as they chased the protesters out of Silverton.

The Seattle Times reported July 24, 2013 that **"You don't often see a musical comedy in which a transgender man and the woman he fancies sing about their mutual attraction — and agree the man shouldn't have a sex-change operation. That may be a first in 'Stu for Silverton,' the genially groundbreaking, appealing new show introduced by Intiman Theatre in its current summer festival."** This musical is a rare and uplifting stand-out production, which has "more in common with *Our Town* and *The Music Man* than *La Cage Aux Folles*" (*Seattle Times*). **City Arts calls the production a**

“bellwether of change” and Misha Berson, theatre critic for *The Seattle Times* calls it “downright wholesome.”

The new musical is produced as part of a new program, ***Start Up Stagings***, that has been launched by Intiman to support the development of new work for the national stage. The theatre has commissioned, workshopped, and given significant production resources to this developmental new musical that will continue to change and shift all the way through closing. This production is not technically the world-premiere, and the creators of the project and Intiman Theatre are currently looking for partners for the world-premiere and next steps.

The cast features Mark Anders (Stu Rasmussen), Bobbi Kotula (Victoria), Charles Leggett (Narrator), Adam Standley (Joe Barker and Lovely Lady), G. Valmont Thomas (Jim Hodgett), Marty Mukhalian (Jean-Ann), Kylee Rousellot (Barb), Tracy Michelle Hughes (Nina), and Chelsea Callahan, Drew Combs, Brian Culbertson, Chelsea LaValley, Matt Reed, and Benjamin Wippel in various roles.

Enclosed:

Production Photos
Seattle Times Review
Seattle Times Feature
CityArts Feature
BroadwayWorld.com Coverage
New York Times Feature on Intiman Theatre (featuring *Stu for Silverton*)

*Additional materials, including video, photography, recordings, and script, available upon request. **More production photos and video at Intiman.org.***

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Palace







The Seattle Times

Winner of Nine Pulitzer Prizes

The Arts

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'Stu for Silverton' sings about small-town tolerance

A review of "Stu for Silverton," an appealing musical based on the real mayor of Silverton, Ore. — the nation's first openly transgender mayor — premiering at the Intiman Theatre Festival.

By Misha Berson

Seattle Times theater critic

You don't often see a musical comedy in which a transgender man and the woman he fancies sing about their mutual attraction — and agree the man shouldn't have a sex-change operation.

That may be a first in "Stu for Silverton," the genially groundbreaking, appealing new show introduced by Intiman Theatre in its current summer festival.

You might expect campy razzle-dazzle in a show inspired by the transformation of the real Stu Rasmussen from a shy, small-town Oregon man into a transvestite mayor dolled up in miniskirts, high heels and tops revealing his greatly enhanced cleavage.

Surprise, surprise.

In director Andrew Russell's vivaciously clever staging, "Stu for Silverton" has more in common with "Our Town" and "The Music Man" than with "La Cage Aux Folles." It's a fond tribute to small-town Americana at its best, and to the kind of tolerance ordinary citizens can rise to.

In fact, "Stu for Silverton," sexual frankness and all, is downright wholesome. And a warmly humorous book by Peter Duchan, and surprisingly mainstream Broadway-style score by New York cabaret artist Breedlove, make it quite accessible to viewers of all gender persuasions.

With droll narration by a twinkly, bow-tied gent, akin to the Stage Manager in "Our Town" (played by a folksy Charles Leggett), it opens with a tongue-in-cheek anthem, "God Loves Silverton." As smiley adults and kids scamper about, this Oregon hamlet is framed as a perfectly square, content and neighborly oasis. It's a play on a hackneyed stereotype, but it's easy irony and the one number that could use a major trim.

As depicted here, good-natured Stu (endearing Mark Anders) is a Silverton native and movie-house owner who is a pushover when a friend needs a car fixed or a lift to Portland.

But he's also lonely and out of touch with his true nature until a movie featuring a flaming transvestite blows his mind, in a wonderful "Rocky Horror Picture Show" number. Befriended by an encouraging (and very funny) transgender Portland support group, Stu gingerly begins to cruise women's lingerie stores and dab on cosmetics.

Still, he remains attracted to the opposite sex. And in a hilarious first-date scene and risqué duet ("I Like What's Going on Down There") he meets his match in the sharp-witted, lusty Victoria, played by that scene-stealing force of nature, Bobbi Kotula.

But a guy stepping out in women's duds is no breeze in provincial Silverton. Friends are curious, wary, disgusted by Stu's new look, and begin to view the town native as an outsider ("What's Stu Up

to Now?").

Then Stu comes out even further. He opposes a plan to turn Silverton's quaint downtown into a strip mall, and runs for mayor — and wins.

Though many characters and details are invented, Duchan's book follows the general outlines of the real Rasmussen's life. The show ends with what got him on the national news: When Silverton residents heard that the Westboro Baptist Church was planning a vicious, homophobic picketing of their town and new mayor, citizens got behind Stu, big-time.

In the musical, fanatical protesters march through the audience, expressing their venomous bigotry in song and signage. And when the townspeople drive them out of town with a countermarch, it's very moving.

"Stu for Silverton" has charming, low-key choreography by Mark Haim, simple, effective scenery by Jennifer Zeyl and apropos costuming by Melanie Taylor Burgess. While the acting is on the nose, the singing can be spotty.

Intiman has labeled this a work-in-progress, and requested no press critiques. But The Seattle Times decided to review "Stu for Silverton" because it is fully staged, it had previews and is now in a lengthy run, and charges regular ticket prices.

There's some work to be done here: Stu is almost too good to be true, and a less saintly protagonist might give the show a little edge. That opening number could use a revamp. And arguably, with its eager promotion of small-town values, "Stu for Silverton" can seem almost too sweet, like a triple-dip cone from an old-timey ice-cream parlor.

But such treats can be very refreshing in midsummer. And how pleasant, for a change, to see a tale of collective tolerance that happens to be true.

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The Seattle Times

Winner of Nine Pulitzer Prizes

The Arts

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Meet the real Stu from musical 'Stu for Silverton'

A talk with Stu Rasmussen, transgender mayor of Silverton, Ore. — who happens to be the subject of "Stu for Silverton," a new musical about his life by Intiman Theatre.

By Misha Berson

Seattle Times theater critic

Why agree to let Intiman Theatre produce a musical based on your unconventional life? Stu Rasmussen says his stamp of approval was mostly about civic boosterism.

The mayor of the rural town of Silverton, Ore., and likely the first — or only — openly transgender mayor in the U.S., Rasmussen and his longtime female partner, Victoria Sage, visited Seattle recently to attend the opening of the new musical. Written by Peter Duchan and composed by the pop musician Breedlove, "Stu for Silverton" is based loosely on Rasmussen's transition from businessman in guy garb to public servant in spike heels.

The show closes with a newsworthy scene from 2008, when Silverton residents drove anti-gay pickets from Westboro Baptist Church out of town with a cross-dressing counterprotest.

Rasmussen tears up a little when he recalls that show of support. "I don't think of the show as my story so much as a Silverton story and a human-nature story," noted the dry-witted mayor, who is in his mid-60s, and was wearing his red hair long and casual women's clothing.

"It's about being true to yourself, and having others appreciate you for what you are."

Rasmussen runs the local movie house and founded the first cable-TV company in Silverton. Though the musical depicts his mayoral campaign as his first political race, he first served on the town's City Council, and also its library board.

"If you don't involve yourself in politics, you're destined to be governed by your inferiors," Rasmussen cracked wryly.

He's now in his second term as mayor and, he cracks, "probably one of two tourist attractions in town." (The other is the botanical park, The Oregon Garden.) And Rasmussen is easy to meet with: There's no mayor's office, so he holds court in a local coffee shop.

"I'm one of the most accessible mayors in the country," he declares. And also one of the most dedicated shoppers. After being interviewed, he and Sage went off to check out Seattle thrift shops. "He has a thing for clothes," Sage said. "And don't get him started on shoes."

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Stu: the Musical

May 25, 2013 | by **GEMMA WILSON**



The wholesome, unlikely folktale of a small town in Oregon and America's first transgender mayor.

Andrew Russell was biking on Manhattan's Upper West Side in 2009, listening to the podcast *Radiolab* when he heard something that nearly stopped him in his tracks. Through his earbuds came the story of Stu Rasmussen, America's first openly transgender mayor, and the controversy that inspired his small, conservative Oregon town to come together in a remarkable display of public support. Russell was moved.

At the time, he was juggling two jobs: one as assistant to Pulitzer Prize-winning playwright Tony Kushner, the other evaluating potential scripts for a heavyweight Broadway musical producer. He knew when a story had stage legs, and as a gay man from small-town Indiana, the story of Silverton spoke to him personally.

At that point Russell was six months away from relocating to Seattle to serve as associate director at the Intiman Theatre. It was all too perfect: Russell wanted to

create a piece of theatre about Rasmussen, and his new job would put him a four-hour drive from the man himself. In late 2009, knowing nothing more than this was a beautiful story that needed to be told, Russell hit I-5 to meet with Mayor Rasmussen. They talked over milk and cookies. Then Rasmussen gave Russell the green light to tell his life story.

Months passed and Russell was going full speed ahead with the project. Things fell apart in 2011 when the Intiman shuttered due to financial troubles. Russell, determined to keep the Tony-winning regional theatre afloat, made a proposal to the Board of Directors to reinvent Intiman as a summer festival, with himself as artistic director.

It worked. For a year, the Stu project took a backseat while Russell wrangled the ensemble-based festival into being, but after the festival's successful launch last summer he began looking forward to 2013. He wanted the second festival to be bigger, better and more innovative than the first.

Finally, the time has come for Russell's new musical about American's first transgender mayor. This summer, *Stu for Silverton* will make its debut on the festival's stage.

* * *

Stu Rasmussen likes to say that Silverton is "40 miles and 40 years from Portland." A former timber town, Silverton has a population of less than 10,000 and takes about 10 minutes to navigate. The downtown is quaintly speckled with shops full of vintage wares and tchotchkes. Parking meters cost 25 cents an hour. Strangers smile and ask how your day is going.

Seated at Silverton's Stone Creek Café on Main Street on a flawless, sunny day in April, the 64-year-old Rasmussen radiates pride in his hometown. "Silverton is the character," he says. "I'm just along for the ride." Coming from a man wearing sky-high red pumps to match his short, red skirt and black shirt—heavy on the cleavage—that's saying something.

The story of Silverton has long been a story worth telling, Rasmussen says, his low,

flat voice contrasting his bright red fingernails. But, he points out, it didn't really turn into a *story* until the Westboro Baptist Church showed up. The extremist, hate-mongering congregation arrived in 2008, hurling fire and brimstone.

But that's the climax of Rasmussen's tale. The beginning is much less dramatic.

Rasmussen grew up here a brainy technophile, always learning and tinkering. He brought cable TV to town, co-owns the local movie house, the Palace Theatre, and has held public office many times, beginning in 1984. He's served on the City Council and the library board, and was elected Mayor first in 1988 and again in 1990.

He also harbored a private inclination toward cross-dressing. It began in 1975 when he saw *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*, starring Tim Curry in a full corset and heels. The movie musical launched Rasmussen's transformation into the man he is today.

First were his fingernails, which he started manicuring 20 years ago. At first, no polish. Then "masculine" colors like blue and, later, acrylic tips. Sometimes, Rasmussen dressed up in women's clothing to promote whatever film was playing at the Palace Theatre—*Star Wars* or *My Big Fat Greek Wedding*. He started wearing a padded bra under his plaid shirts until he worked up the nerve to get breast implants in early 2000.

The changes to Rasmussen's appearance happened incrementally, giving Silvertonians plenty of time to adjust and adapt and Rasmussen opportunity to gauge their reactions. When he wore false breasts to his job as a software designer, how would his co-workers respond? These were things Rasmussen needed to know as he slowly and deliberately reinvented himself as a transgender man.

Not everyone in Silverton was on board with the new Stu. Business at the Palace Theatre took a hit; on occasion, local kids yelled slurs. Rasmussen's partner of nearly 40 years, Victoria Sage, told *Radiolab* producers that she heard plenty of whispering along the way, but as a lifelong resident of the town and longtime public servant, Rasmussen was impossible to dismiss. When he was reelected Mayor in

2008—then 60 years old and living as an openly transgender person—the story exploded beyond the Silverton town limits.

The media flurry was intense. Rasmussen was suddenly everywhere, as news stations flocked from around the country to share this feel-good story of American inclusion. When members of Westboro Baptist caught wind, however, they came from Kansas to let Silverton know what they thought of its Mayor. Brandishing signs that read *God Hates You* and *You're Going to Hell*, Westbroro protestors set up shop on a Silverton street corner.

Silverton answered right back. The town, including the man Rasmussen defeated in the Mayoral election, showed up downtown to march the Westboro protestors away. Legions of people, some dressed in reverse-gendered clothing, held signs like *My love is bigger than your hate* and *We love Stu (and so does God)*.

"That was such a great experience for the community and I think for the world at large," Rasmussen says. Four years later, he can't keep emotion from his voice when recalling the events of that day.

"Here's a community that told Westboro to go to hell. But we showed them Silverton hospitality while they were here and waved goodbye when they left."

* * *

When Russell was first ruminating on how to tell Rasmussen's story on stage, he envisioned it as a play. But a drama seemed too heavy, too serious. He wanted it to sing.

"It's *Rocky Horror* meets *Our Town*," Russell says more than once. Music, he was sure, would keep the show from getting bogged down into a ponderous, message-laden biopic. Getting the tone right was crucial.

Russell went searching for collaborators to tell this story with him, hoping to find people who were at similar points of transformation and growth in their careers. His agent sent him songs by New York singer-songwriter Breedlove (aka Craig Jessup) and a play by Peter Duchan. He was immediately sold on both. Duchan had just the

right literary voice for the project, and Breedlove's music fit the *Our Town/Rocky Horror* vibe perfectly. "There's something about it that's sincere, glam rock, but also completely traditional Americana rock pop," Russell says.

Both Duchan and Breedlove were equally taken with Rasmussen.

"When I met him, I fell in love with him," Breedlove says. "I wanted to help other people meet the person I had fallen in love with, and paint a picture of him that would make my 80-something-year-old grandmothers, who are both Baptist ministers' widows, come to this show and leave thinking that he's the greatest person in the world."

The score is a combination of traditional musical theatre and folk music, shot through with the aural opulence of '60s and '70s musicals that infuses Breedlove's solo work.

"I like the juxtaposition that exists in Stu's life of kind of being a flashy hot broad in a small town," Breedlove says.

In devising a script that would let the story speak for itself, the *Stu* creative team went through three different iterations of the show, each wildly different in its storytelling. One was a traditional, chronological biopic that left viewers of an early reading asking, "Where's the town?" Another used a complicated framing device, wherein Rasmussen told his own story to an audience at the Palace Theatre. Their third and current version is much simpler, a classic "Once upon a time" musical that spans 30 years with clarity and ease.

"We kept trying to impose a theatricality onto it," Duchan says. "It took us a little while to figure out that the theatricality *is* the story and the characters."

* * *

In an Intiman rehearsal studio this March, the three creators of *Stu for Silverton*—which was Rasmussen's campaign slogan—heard their show for the first time. At the very top of the show, a friendly narrator delivers a history lesson on Silverton, accompanied by music that could score an episode of *Leave It to Beaver*.

Friendly Silvertonians smile at one another and sing about the wonder of the changing seasons. It's so wholesome you can almost smell the apple pie.

It's no accident that you meet Silverton well before you meet Stu. He's the central figure of this unlikely folktale, but to focus on him exclusively would miss the bigger story.

"It would be sad if people took away, 'How brave that that man did this.'" Russell says. "No, it's, *How brave that a city created an environment where this could happen.*"

That's how Rasmussen wanted it. When he handed off his life story to this team of theatre makers, his one request was that Silverton be treated fairly. Which only stands to reason; as Mayor, part of his job is being the "PR guy for Silverton."

Still, Rasmussen's interest in the show is personal as well as professional. "I look back on my life and what I went through to get to where I am," he says. "It's great if we can make it easier for somebody who's in a similar situation—and it might not be a gender issue, it might be sexual orientation, or anything—to be able to say, 'Well, it's been done before,' and move forward."

Rasmussen's willingness to have his story adapted for the stage is one of the reasons this project has gone forward with such grace, and why the three young men telling the story of Stu Rasmussen are as inspired by him as they expect audiences will be.

"It takes the complicated trans issue and says, 'Fuck it, if they're your neighbor, you'll love them whoever they are,'" Russell says. Rasmussen is so unconcerned with PC sticking points like the "right" pronoun that there's a song in the show with the lyric, *He can call me she, and she can call me he.*

All this plays out on a simple set filled with Silvertonia—picnic benches and plush red theatre seats; a gilded age Palace marquee and faded murals from the town's timber days. An onstage band rocks Breedlove's score stage right, as veteran Seattle actor Mark Anders brings Stu center stage.

* * *

Title billing goes to Rasmussen's personal reinvention, but it's just one of many playing out in *Stu for Silverton*. Today, the town is transitioning from dying lumber outpost to bed-and-breakfast community. Breedlove is making a long-awaited leap from solo artist to theatre composer. Russell is establishing himself as an artistic director with vision and purpose.

Intiman is the theatre that first produced Pulitzer Prize-winning play *The Kentucky Cycle*, and Tony-winning musical *Light in the Piazza* and the first regional production of *Angels in America*. Russell kept that adventurous spirit alive in 2012 with Dan Savage's drag musical, *Miracle!*, and it may be why he never once worried about how the *Stu* project would be received.

"It only seems appropriate that a story about the Pacific Northwest is made in the Pacific Northwest," he says. And it has to be told at Intiman, like Rasmussen's election had to happen in Silverton. Both are bellwethers of change.

Stu for Silverton runs as part of the Intiman Theatre Festival June 21–Sept. 15.

Illustration by Tiffany Prothero



First Look at Bobbi Kotula, Mark Anders and More in STU FOR SILVERTON at Intiman

[Back to the Article](#)

by Jay Irwin

As part of their Start Up Stagings Initiative, The [Intiman Theatre](#) is currently presenting a brand new musical in progress, "Stu For Silverton" included in the [Intiman Theatre](#) Festival running through this summer. And while it's a little too soon to give a critical review of the piece as it's still being developed, I can share with you some images from the show and a bit of a synopsis (and maybe a quick opinion or two).

Once upon a time, not too long ago, a new American folk hero was born in the small town of Silverton, Oregon. A lifelong resident of Silverton, Stu Rasmussen was launched into the spotlight when he became America's first openly transgender Mayor in 2008. Struggling to overcome the weight of adversity, Stu found uncompromising support and love in the most unlikely of places. Based on true-life events, with music and lyrics by Brooklyn-based songwriter Breedlove and book by acclaimed playwright [Peter Duchan](#), this new musical blends "Our Town" with "The Rocky Horror Picture Show" and tells a surprising story full of heart and hope in humanity. Stu's story is one of not compromising, being entirely yourself, and believing in the power of change - in cities big and small.

As I said, the show is still in development but I can say it shows a ton of promise and has even more heart. And I have to comment on the outstanding performances of the two leads, [Mark Anders](#) and [Bobbi Kotula](#). Anders manages a beautiful vulnerability mixed with unswerving dignity and nails the role. And the always amazing Kotula belts out her numbers to the rafters and keeps the show's hilarity and heart alive. And both completely inhabit and disappear into their roles. These are two performances not to miss.

"Stu For Silverton" performs at the Cornish Playhouse at Seattle Center (formerly Intiman Playhouse) through September 15th. For tickets or information contact the Intiman box office at 206-441-7178 or visit them online at www.intiman.org.

Reincarnated and Clad in Humble Garb

Intiman Theater in Seattle downsizes to a summer festival

By PATRICK HEALY

SEATTLE — During a recent rehearsal here of the new musical "Sit for Silverton," the director, Andrew Russell, asked the people in the room to introduce themselves. Several of the actors were students and recent alumni of Cornish College of the Arts, while crew members described themselves as interns. Mr. Russell himself was boyish at 30, tying his long black hair into a knotted ball, and offering zippy superlatives after each scene: "Nice nice nice nice" and "Good good good" and "High five high five."

One might have easily mistaken the show as part of the Cornish acting program; the nine-foot-tall signpost outside the theater read Cornish Playhouse, after all. But a closer look at the sign revealed the outlines of another name, papered over but still faintly visible — Intiman Theater. And with Intiman's production of "Sit for Silverton," a world premiere about the real-life transgendered mayor of a once-gon town, the old artistic spirit of a once-mighty theater company is faintly visible, too.

Only a few years ago, Intiman was employing experienced New York and Seattle players, winning the Tony Award for outstanding regional theater in 2006, and serving as the home base for an acclaimed Broadway director, Bartlett Sher ("South Pacific"). But, as has been much chronicled by theater writers in Seattle and nationally, Intiman hit bottom in 2011 after Mr. Sher left as artistic director. The board



Matthew Star Williams for Ted and Tony Tang

From the top, a rehearsal last month of the musical "Sit for Silverton" at the Intiman Theater in Seattle.

The New York Times

"All the News That's Fit to Print"

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July 12, 2013

Reincarnated and Clad in Humble Garb

By **PATRICK HEALY**

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Only a few years ago, Intiman was employing experienced New York and Seattle actors, winning the Tony Award for outstanding regional theater in 2006, and serving as the home base for an acclaimed Broadway director, Bartlett Sher (“South Pacific”). But, as has been much chronicled by theater writers in Seattle and nationally, [Intiman hit bottom](#) in 2011 after Mr. Sher left as artistic director. The board revealed that debts totaled more than \$2 million (the theater had an annual budget of just \$6 million), with some trustees accusing their former managing director of hiding the financial troubles, and outside analysts saying revenues did not keep pace with ambitious productions.

The board [laid off the staff in April 2011](#) and canceled the remaining four shows of the season. Intiman looked irretrievable.

Not to some of its trustees and artists, though. Unlike theaters in Seattle and elsewhere that have gone under in recent years, as their aspirations and expenses outpaced income, Intiman has reconstituted itself as a far smaller enterprise — the Intiman Theater Festival, which began in July 2012 with a mission of producing four shows every summer with a company of Seattle actors, instead of five-to-seven shows throughout much of the

Intiman also gave up its lease on its 440-seat theater; Cornish College has the le

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is renting the space to Intiman for the summer.

In its new incarnation, Intiman has become that rare thing in the ego-driven, reputation-obsessed world of theater — a humble endeavor, as reflected in the scale of its shows; the decision by its trustees to accept responsibility for poor past management; and the contrite overtures by the theater’s leaders to donors and grant-making foundations.

“While there are some people who question why Intiman continues to exist, who don’t trust us and who won’t give us money, we’re trying to make clear to our audiences and funders that we’ve learned from our mistakes and can be trusted again,” said Cynthia Huffman, the board’s new president, a philanthropist and former director of the Bank Street Head Start program in New York.

Ms. Huffman, speaking over a dinner of shrimp salad last month before the festival’s first performance of 2013, said that the critical part of regaining trust has been Intiman’s new “pay as you go” business model. Intiman raised \$1 million in 2012 for the inaugural festival before the board gave the official go-ahead for the productions, then raised \$700,000 last winter before doing the same for this year’s. The board was restructured, and many members left; there are now 14 trustees, half of them new, compared with 22 trustees in 2011.

Asked if the current board was simply forestalling the 41-year-old theater’s eventual demise, Ms. Huffman denied that she and her colleagues were keeping Intiman alive simply so it does not fail on their watch. (She joined the board in 2007 and became its president in April.) She said the board was steadily paying down the debt and taking responsibility that, in 2011, was largely dumped on the former managing director, Brian Colburn, after his abrupt resignation.

“When financial problems happen, you can’t point blame, because there’s enough to go around,” she said. “Everyone involved probably could have done something better. But the board is ultimately responsible.” (Mr. Colburn did not respond to an interview request.)

The new Intiman is largely the brainchild of Mr. Russell, the theater’s producing artistic director in addition to the director and creator of “Stu for Silverton.” A former personal assistant to Tony Kushner and a freelance director in New York, Mr. Russell moved to Seattle in 2010 to become Intiman’s associate producer at the behest of the director Kate Whoriskey (“Ruined”), who had succeeded Mr. Sher after he [handpicked her](#) (with the board’s blessing).

After Ms. Whoriskey, Mr. Russell, and the rest of the staff were laid off, Mr. Russell said he decided to stick around Seattle for the summer “before presumably moving back to New York and figuring out my life.” During that time, Intiman’s trustees, working with an arts consultant, undertook a far-reaching analysis of the theater’s finances, identifying problems

over many years, and then began conversations with artists like Mr. Russell about Intiman's future.

"I thought the theater could fill a niche even with limited means," Mr. Russell said. "Few theaters in Seattle have ambitious summer shows, and very few in America have the repertory company of actors playing multiple roles in a season. So having a summer repertory festival seemed unique, and a way to give work to artists during a slow time."

The repertory company is also a way to save some money on salaries and benefits, given that most actors are taking on two or even three roles. Mark Anders, for instance, a longtime local actor who is playing the title character in "Stu for Silverton," is also in "Trouble in Mind," a play by Alice Childress about race in the theater world. (The other festival plays this summer are "We Won't Pay! We Won't Pay" by Dario Fo and "Lysistrata" by Aristophanes.) With no money for star salaries or subsidized housing, Intiman is no longer a magnet for Broadway talent. The 23-member repertory company is a mix of veterans and newcomers, with only six members of the Actors' Equity professional union, according to the festival playbill.

Six full-time staff members work year round, with Mr. Russell doing double duty as a director. He has been developing "Stu for Silverton" for three years, with the book writer Peter Duchan ("Dogfight") and the New York singer-songwriter Breedlove, and its world premiere this summer is a reminder of some of Intiman's achievements under Mr. Sher — like the musical "The Light in the Piazza," which [transferred to Broadway](#) and won six Tonys.

No one is claiming that "Stu" is the next "Light in the Piazza," to be sure. But Mr. Russell sees the new musical — about Mayor Stu Rasmussen and the people of Silverton, Ore., who marched to defend him against antigay protesters — as a continuation of Intiman's focus on American folk heroes, which Mr. Sher brought to life with his American Cycle series of plays like "Our Town" and "The Grapes of Wrath."

Last summer's festival drew strong audiences, in part because Intiman's subscribers from 2011 — who had most of their season canceled — were given free tickets. As for the work itself, Misha Berson, the influential theater critic of The Seattle Times, delivered [mixed grades](#). She praised its "Romeo and Juliet," but was critical of Mr. Russell's staging of "Hedda Gabler" and mixed on John Patrick Shanley's "Dirty Story." And she was underwhelmed by what turned out to be an audience hit, "Miracle!," a sexually explicit drag version of "The Miracle Worker" created by Dan Savage, the Seattle-based author and gay activist.

"There was a lot of murder and suicide last summer, and more humor this summer, which I think will help," Ms. Berson said in an interview. "But the big question for Intiman is the audience. Will they show up in summertime, when most people are outdoors, on their boats,

on vacation?”

That question is an anxiety inducing one for Ms. Huffman and Mr. Russell, especially since they lack a marquee Seattle name like Mr. Savage. Over dinner, though, Ms. Huffman let out a squeal at one point and handed her smartphone to Mr. Russell. She had just received a photo of several people in line at the box office to buy tickets for “We Won’t Pay!,” the kickoff performance for the festival.

“Sorry, we just get excited about these things,” Ms. Huffman said. “I can’t predict with certainty where we’ll be a year from now, but right now — this is good.”